

'Civil' violators pay up

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DARRYL Q. TUCKER

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In May 2004, a Saginaw County judge warned citizens who owed money for civil infractions to pay up or face jail.

Nearly three years later, Chief District Judge Kyle Higgs Tarrant says most adhered to her advice and took care of obligations to the tune of \$950,360. Of that, the county received \$444,320, while the state collected \$506,040.

"The state gets a lot of money from us that theoretically benefits you at some level, depending on how the state spends it," Tarrant said.

By law, the state receives \$40 for every traffic infraction, she said. Both the county and state use the funds for their general budgets, she said. For example, if the fine for not wearing a seat belt is \$65, the state receives \$40 and the county collects \$25.

"If we didn't do anything at all, then we would be much worse off," Tarrant said. "Over time that does add up. It will make a difference in the long run."

From 2000 to 2004, police handed out more than 3,800 tickets that totaled \$1.2 million. For those who didn't pay by June 1, 2004, district judges signed arrest warrants that officials placed in a statewide database, meaning violators faced arrest anywhere in Michigan.

Violators face up to 93 days in jail and \$100 in fines.

During the first two weeks of an amnesty period that ended June 1, 2004, the county collected more than \$54,000 from 397 people, officials said.

"People don't understand that they can go to jail for not paying traffic tickets," Tarrant said. v

